

24 March 2021
Senate Committee on Education

RE: Senate Bill 782

Chair Dembrow, Co-Chairs, and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Rayleah Trice. I am a senior in High School in Woodland, Washington. I'm also a volunteer for Youthline, a teen-to-teen crisis line in Portland, Oregon and Trauma Intervention Program (TIP), and I'm writing this to ask for your support for Senate Bill 782.

Senate Bill 782 is important because it will encourage honesty in a setting that is not always comfortable for students. High school can be an uncomfortable place for a lot of young people but having a program like this to allow students to express themselves would help catch mental health issues early. It would also help teachers be more comfortable because they would not have to directly ask struggling students if they need help as this is not easy to do. It is also tough to be honest with adults in some situations about what the students are truly feeling so this would give them a safe space to express themselves. Overall, each party involved would not have to step too far out of their comfort zones.

I personally struggled with anxiety while I was in high school and I was not the only one. One of my close friends experienced frequent panic and anxiety attacks at school. She did not have any support from her parents or her teachers because no one truly knew what she was going through and tended to shame her when asking what was wrong. Asking questions like "what's wrong with you now?" or "what do you have to cry about?" are not helpful, but none of the adults in her life knew a better way to ask. It took her three years to finally open up about what was going on and the person she confided in spent the least amount of time with. Her doctor had asked her in an appointment about her mental health and she felt safe enough to be honest. This is why having screenings at schools would be so important as conversations about mental health would become more normalized and destigmatized. People like my friend would not have to suffer in silence either for so long. Had she been able to be diagnosed sooner she would not have lost so much of her high school experience.

Thank you to everyone who reads this, I am so glad I'm able to share my story in support of SB 782.

Respectfully,

Rayleah Trice
YouthLine Volunteer